NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

PIONEERS OF CHANGE: SHAPING THE FUTURE TOGETHER

National Hispanic Heritage Month

National Hispanic Heritage Month (NHHM) commemorates the many achievements and cultures of Hispanic Americans. Celebrated from September 15th through October 15th, it is the only Department of Defense special observance to span multiple months, coinciding with independence day celebrations for several Latin American countries.

During this time of year, the Department of Defense (DoD) honors the Hispanic Americans who have sacrificed for, contributed to, and served our great nation.

Theme/Presentation

The 2024 NHHM theme is "*Pioneers of Change: Shaping the Future Together.*" This theme emphasizes the Hispanic Americans who have sacrificed to create a better future for the Nation and all Americans.

The future is impacted by leaders of bravery, humanitarianism, and selflessness. This is exemplified through the actions of Captain Mery-Angela Katson, Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez, and Roberto Clemente.

Mery-Angela Katson (1 of 3)

Captain Mery-Angela Katson is a U.S. Navy leader who has spent her career facilitating the growth and development of sailors, leading to her becoming the Director of Total Force Manpower, Training and Education Requirements.

Born in Bogota, Colombia, Katson immigrated to the United States in 1970 with her family. After growing up in New Rochelle, New York, she enlisted in the Navy in 1982 to repay the country that gave her family a new home.

Mery-Angela Katson (2 of 3)

When Katson reported to the USS Point Loma, she was undesignated, meaning she didn’t have an assigned job. However, her commanding officer recognized her potential and advocated for her to apply to college. She soon did, gained her naturalized citizenship, and became a commissioned officer in 1992.

She began training prospective officers at the U.S. Naval Academy, instructing cadets in Naval Leadership and Ethics and Basic Shipboard Tactics and Maneuvering. She spent the next 3 decades as a human

Mery-Angela Katson (3 of 3)

Later, she served as the Naval Operations Education Strategy and Policy branch head, creating many successful career tracks for new sailors.

As of April 2023, Katson serves as the director of Total Force Manpower, Training and Education Requirements. She also performs duties as the acting Director of Military Personnel Plans and Policy. Within these positions, she oversees critical policy and funding decisions, and tackles

Roy Benavidez (1 of 4)

Master Sergeant Roy Benavidez was a soldier with tremendous honor and courage and is a recipient of the Medal of Honor for his bravery in the Vietnam War.

Benavidez was born in 1935 in the small town of Cuero, Texas. He lost his parents at a young age, dropped out of high school, and eventually joined the Texas National Guard. He later transferred to the active Army, as part of the 82nd Airborne Division. In 1965, Benavidez deployed to Vietnam.

Roy Benavidez (2 of 4)

While on patrol, Benavidez stepped on a land mine and was so badly injured that doctors told him he might never walk again. Through sheer willpower, he secretly began a nightly training routine to redevelop his legs.

Miraculously, he walked again, avoided discharge, and returned to the 82nd Airborne. In 1967, he joined the 5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam. The next year, he embarked on a deadly rescue mission that would earn him the Medal of Honor.

Roy Benavidez (3 of 4)

Benavidez leapt out of helicopter to aid a 12-man team that was greatly outnumbered and under heavy fire. As he ran to the team's position, he was shot in the leg and struck by shrapnel. Despite his injuries, he managed to organize the forces, tend to the wounded, and provide cover as they boarded an extraction aircraft.

Their helicopter crashed, and Benavidez was shot in the abdomen. Still, he secured classified documents, helped the wounded, and managed to call in air strikes to secure another extraction.

Trapped on the ground for 6 hours, Benavidez was wounded several more times while carrying injured Service members and important documents back and forth to the rescue

Roy Benavidez (4 of 4)

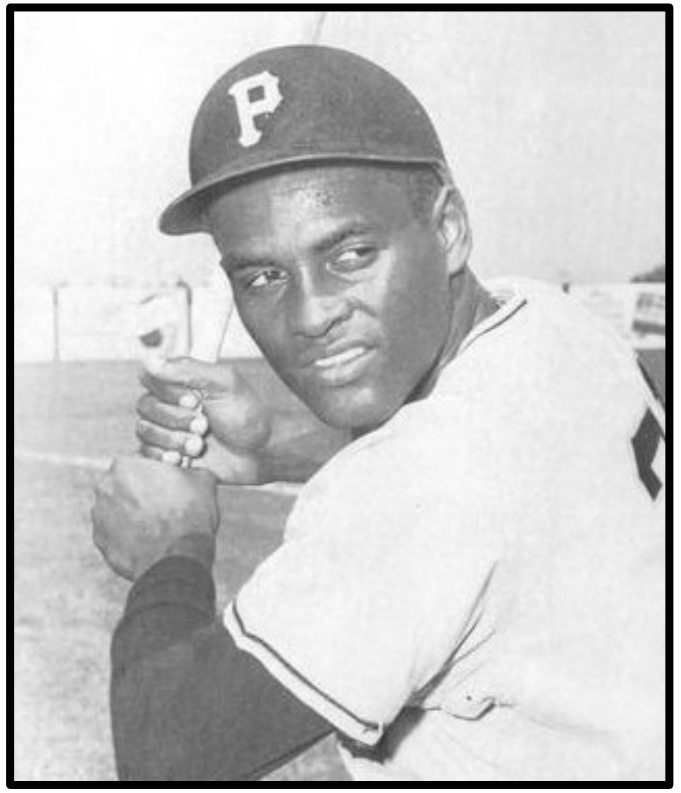
Benavidez suffered 37 wounds and was thought dead. He was placed in a body bag. Then it was discovered that he was in fact alive. He recovered over the next year and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

In 1981, his award was upgraded to the Medal of Honor after an eyewitness to his mission was discovered.

Until his death in 1998, he mentored underprivileged children and successfully advocated for continued benefits for

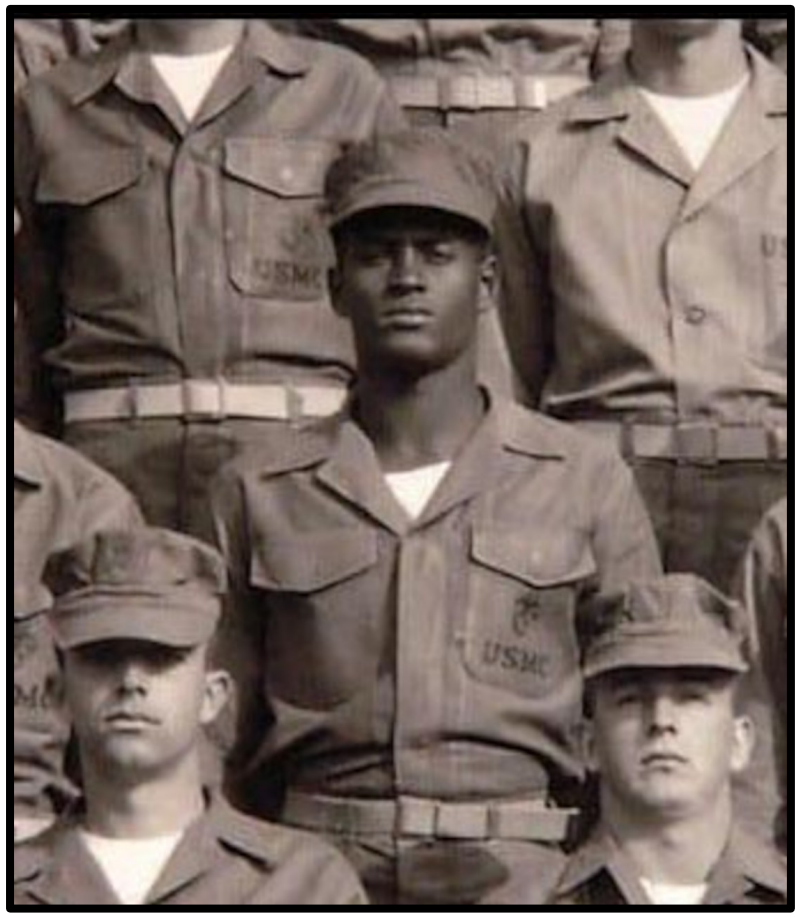
Roberto Clemente (1 of 4)

Roberto Clemente was a legendary Puerto Rican baseball player who faced adversity, served his country, became a champion, and sacrificed everything to help others.



Born in 1934 in Carolina, Puerto Rico, Roberto Clemente Walker spent his young life playing track and field sports as well as baseball. At just 17 years old, he began playing for the Santurce Crabbers. By 1954, he was scouted by and signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Roberto Clemente (2 of 4)



The following year, Clemente joined the Pittsburgh Pirates, an organization upon which he would leave an indelible mark. While there, he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1958, as a Reserve infantryman. For the following 6 years, he spent his offseasons serving his country.

Private First Class Clemente spent 6 months on active duty at Parris Island, South Carolina, and Camp LeJeune, North Carolina.

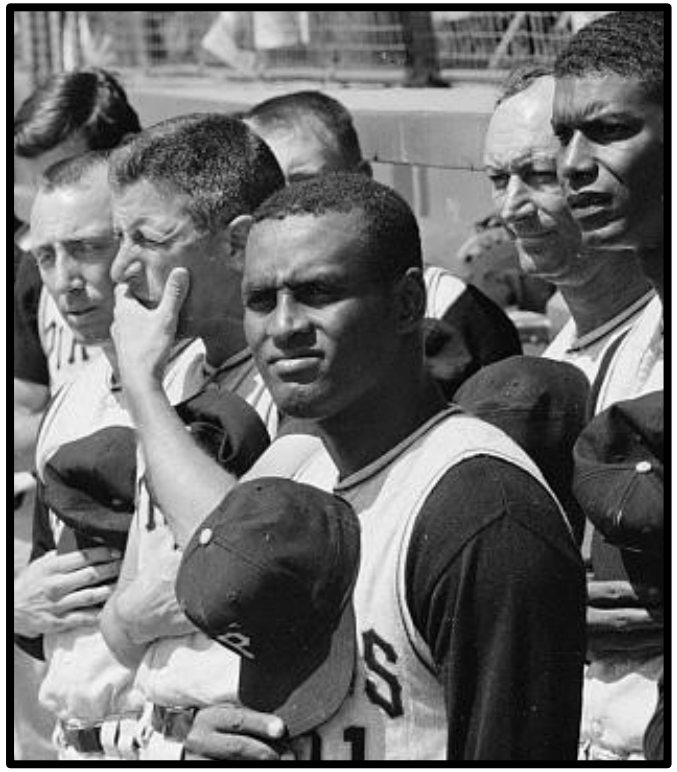
Roberto Clemente (3 of 4)

In his iconic “21” jersey, Clemente dominated with the Pirates, starting in 1960, when he help the team defeat the New York Yankees in the World Series.

Clemente is noted as one of the best right fielders in baseball history. When the Pirates won the World Series again in 1971, Clemente won the Most Valuable Player

Roberto Clemente (4 of 4)

In the early 1970s, Clemente secured sponsorships for baseball clinics in Puerto Rico, coached an amateur baseball team in Nicaragua, and worked on plans to build a sports complex for underprivileged children.



In 1972, a devastating earthquake struck Nicaragua. Clemente raised over $150,000 and 26 tons of food, clothing, and medicine to help. On his way to transport supplies to those impacted, his plane crashed, and he tragically died. However, his legacy of humanitarianism lives on.

Conclusion

Through selfless service, helping others, and sacrifice, Mery-Angela Katson, Roy Benavidez, and Roberto Clemente have shaped the future for countless others.

The Department of Defense honors them and the many other Hispanic Americans who make our Nation great. NHHM is a rightful time to celebrate the robust cultures and contributions

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